

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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NEA-10 /113 W

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R 130805Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3235

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 25505

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EA PLEASE PASS AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OGEN, APER, TH, US

SUBJ: DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS ON EMBASSY'S ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT

REF: (A) STATE 215358 (B) BANGKOK A-130, JUNE 8, 1976

SUMMARY: THE EMBASSY APPRECIATES THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS (REF A) ON THE EMBASSY'S ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT (REF B). FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC POINTS, KEYED TO PARAGRAPHS OF REF A. END SUMMARY.

1. RE PARA 3 OF REF A. THE EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE AN AMPLIFI-

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CATION ON DEPARTMENT'S REMARKS ABOUT U.S./THAI ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

IN MEETINGS WITH U.S. BANKERS AND BUSINESSMEN IN BANGKOK WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY CONSULTED STATE AND COMMERCE OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON, EMBASSY OFFICERS ARE CONSISTENTLY TOLD OF THE DECIDEDLY NEGATIVE IMPRESSION CONVEYED BY U.S. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN WASHINGTON ABOUT THAILAND. THESE BUSINESSMEN HAVE GENERALLY TOLD US THAT THE EMBASSY VIEW, WHILE NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT NEW INVESTMENT, IS DECIDEDLY NOT ONE OF UNRELIEVED PESSIMISM, IN CONTRAST TO WHAT THEY RECEIVED IN WASHINGTON. EMBASSY FULLY REALIZES THAT SOMETHING MAY BE LOST IN THE TELLING BUT CONSISTENCY OF THE STORY WE GET FROM BUSINESSMEN IS STRONG. REF A IS FIRST INDICATION THAT WE HAVE THAT WASHINGTON IS CURRENTLY INTERESTED IN EXPANDING INVESTMENT IN THAILAND. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL EMBASSY'S STRONG PROTEST AGAINST AN ARBITRARY LIMITATION OF THE OPIC INSURANCE PROGRAM IN THAILAND LAST YEAR (75 BANGKOK 16623). DOES LAST SENTENCE OF PARA 3 IMPLY THAT U.S. IS PREPARED TO INCREASE ITS LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND?

2. RE PARA 4 OF REF A. WE HAVE NOTED COMMENTS AND WILL CONTINUE TO REPORT AS THE SITUATION EVOLVES. THAILAND IS DOMINATED NOW, AS IN THE PAST, BY CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL GROUPS, AND SENI IS A MAJOR CONSERVATIVE LEADER. THE LEFT IN THAILAND IS WEAK AND ALMOST LEADERLESS, HAVING LOST MUCH OF ITS NATIONAL POLITICAL CLOUT IN THE ELECTIONS OF APRIL 1976. THE LEFT IS NOISY AND ACTIVE IN DEMONSTRATIONS, BUT ITS IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION SHOULD NOT BE OVER-EMPHASIZED. AS TO THE FUTURE OF THE SENI GOVERNMENT, WE DISCUSSED THIS SUBJECT AT LENGTH IN PAGES 7-9 OF REF B AND BELIEVE THIS ANALYSIS REMAINS STILL VALID. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE SENI GOVERNMENT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE MORE STABLE THAN ITS PREDECESSOR, ALTHOUGH ITS GRIP ON POWER COULD BE LOOSENED BY INTERNAL CONFLICTS WITHIN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND WITH THE OTHER COALITION PARTIES. SENI IS NOT RPT NOT A DYNAMIC, CHARISMATIC LEADER, BUT THAILAND HAS RARELY HAD SUCH A LEADER.

3. WE ARE PUZZLED BY REFERENCE IN PARA 4 TO SENI AS HAVING "NOT SO FAR PROVED HIMSELF TO BE AS ADEPT A LEADER AS HIS BROTHER". WHILE HAVING CONSIDERABLE STYLE AS A PUBLIC FIGURE (PARTICULARLY IN HIS COMMAND OF ENGLISH), KHUKRIT AS PRIME MINISTER STUMBLED FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS AND WAS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE WEAK AND VACILLATING BY MANY THAI. HE HAD A FUNDAMENTALLY UNMANAGEABLE COALITION OF 16 PARTIES TO PRESIDE OVER, OF COURSE, BUT HIS DEFEAT IN THE 1976

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ELECTIONS DID NOT REFLECT WIDESPREAD APPROBATION OF HIS PERFORMANCE. BECAUSE MANY THAI VIEWED KHUKRIT AS ESSENTIALLY A WEAK PRIME MINISTER, COUP PLOTTING OCCURRED REPEATEDLY DURING 1975 AND EARLY 1976 BUT HAS FADED AWAY SINCE SENI BECAME PRIME MINISTER. KHUKRIT WAS AND IS WELL-DISPOSED TO THE U.S., BUT "ADEPT" IS NOT THE TERM MOST THAI WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE HIS PERFORMANCE AS PRIME MINISTER.

4. RE PARA 5 OF REF A. WE DO NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE THAT ANY USEFUL

PURPOSE IS SERVED BY MAKING INVIDIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE THAI AND BURMESE ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT BASIC DIFFERENCES EXIST BETWEEN THE INTERESTS OF THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IN DEALING WITH NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING GROUPS. TO THE GUB THE NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING GROUPS ARE PERCEIVED PRIMARILY AS INSURGENTS FIGHTING GUB EFFORTS TO EXERT CONTROL OVER VAST AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. THE GUB HAS AN ACTIVE POLITICAL INTEREST IN SUPPRESSING THEIR ACTIVITIES, APART FROM ANY CONCERN IT MAY HAVE REGARDING DRUG ABUSE AS SUCH. TO THE RTG THE DISSIDENT GROUPS (SOME BUT NOT ALL OF WHICH ARE ENGAGED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING) ARE THE BUFFER BETWEEN NORTHERN THAILAND AND COMMUNIST TROOPS IN BURMA.

5. THE DISSIDENTS ARE OFTEN MEMBERS OF THE SAME ETHNIC GROUPS WHO INHABIT MUCH OF THAILAND'S BORDER AREA, AND THEY ARE PERCEIVED AS NO RPT NO THREAT TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THIS COUNTRY. WHILE THE RTG DOESN'T PARTICULARLY WANT THEM AROUND, IT IS UNWILLING TO COMMIT ITS LIMITED MILITARY RESOURCES TO THEIR SUPPRESSION (AND REALIZES THAT ATTEMPTS TO DO SO WOULD PROBABLY PROVE UNSUCCESSFUL IN ANY CASE). ALTHOUGH THE POLITICAL DEDICATION OF SOME OF THE GROUPS CALLED BURMESE DISSIDENTS MAY HAVE BECOME OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE TO THEIR NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES, THE THAI HAVE LONG ALLOWED AND WILL CONTINUE TO TOLERATE THEIR PRESENCE SO LONG AS THEY DO NOT RPT NOT REPRESENT A THREAT TO THAI SECURITY. WE AGREE THAT THERE IS NEED TO CONTINUE CAREFUL MONITORING OF RTG EFFORTS IN THE NARCOTICS FIELD, AND THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE IMPROVED RTG EFFORTS IN THE ANTI-NARCOTICS AREA. IN THIS CONNECTION IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE THAI AUTHORITIES HAVE CONTINUED MAKING IMPRESSIVE SEIZURES OF HARD DRUGS AT DON MUANG AIRPORT AND NOTABLE ARRESTS OF IMPORTANT TRAFFICKERS.

6. RE PARA 6(A). EMBASSY IS AWARE THAT THE PROGRESSIVE DISSOLUTION OF SEATO, TO BE COMPLETED IN THE COURSE OF CALENDAR 1977, HAS NO EXPLICIT EFFECT ON THE MANILA TREATY, WHICH REMAINS AN OBLIGATION
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OF THE UNITED STATES. HOWEVER, IN THE EXISTING POLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE UNITED STATES, WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT IN THE EVENT OF SPECIFIC THREATS TO THE SECURITY OF THAILAND (E.G., A MAJOR UPSURGE OF COMMUNIST INSURGENT ACTIVITY WHICH THE THAI CANNOT CONTAIN WITH THEIR OWN RESOURCES OR OVERT MILITARY PRESSURE BY ONE OR MORE OF THE COMMUNIST STATES ON THAILAND'S BORDERS) THE U.S. WOULD BE PREPARED TO PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT MILITARY SUPPORT TO THAILAND. THIS VIEW UNDERLIES THE SECTION CITED IN THE ASSESSMENT AIRGRAM.

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7. PRIME MINISTER SENI RETAINS A CONSIDERABLE REGARD FOR SEATO AND PROBABLY HOPES THAT THE MANILA TREATY WILL BE OF USE TO THAILAND IN ANY FUTURE EMERGENCY. IN CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR MANSFIELD DURING HIS VISIT TO THAILAND IN AUGUST, PRIME MINISTER SENI AND FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIRU MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY REGRET WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO SEATO (I.E., IT IS BEING DISSOLVED). ON SAME OCCASION A SENIOR OFFICER OF THAI MFA EXPRESSED REGRET FOR THE DEMISE OF SEATO. THE FIRST FORMAL STEPS TO DISMANTLE SEATO WERE TAKEN AT THE COUNCIL MEETING IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER, 1974. THIS EMBASSY HAS REPORTED IN EXTENSO ON THAI ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEATO AND THAI CONCERN THAT THE U.S. APPEARED, IN EFFECT, TO BE ABANDONING THAILAND, A CONCERN WHICH HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED SINCE THE FALL OF SAIGON.

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WE SUBMIT THAT THAI CONCERN OVER THE DOWNGRADING AND NOW THE PROSPECTIVE DISSOLUTION OF SEATO HAS BEEN REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT IN DETAIL OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS.

8. RE PARA 6(B). DEPARTMENT'S COMMENT HAS CONSIDERABLY EXTENDED OUR REMARK IN PARA 3, PAGE 2 OF REF B, WHICH STATED THAT WITHOUT AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT TO SERVE AS SOUNDING BOARD AND RELIEF VALVE THAI POLITICS WOULD HAVE A MUCH GREATER TENDENCY TO POLARIZE AROUND THE CONSERVATIVE THAI MILITARY AND THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. WE ADDED THAT IN SUCH A CASE THERE WOULD BE A POTENTIAL FOR STEPPED-UP INSURGENCY AND A CLUMSY AND SELF-DEFEATING MILITARY REACTION TO THE THREAT. WE DID NOT RPT NOT STATE THAT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES SUCH AS OUTCOME WOULD FOLLOW THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT.

9. RE PARA 6(C). WE HAVE REVIEWED ABOVE THE THAI VIEW OF SEATO AND THE MANILA TREATY. DOES THE DEPARTMENT SERIOUSLY CONTEND THAT THE U.S. WOULD BE PREPARED TO PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR U.S. FORCES TO THAILAND IF THIS COUNTRY FACES A COMMUNIST MILITARY THREAT (INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL) BEYOND ITS CAPACITY TO HANDLE? WE DOUBT THAT THE "PRC HINT" MENTIONED IN PARA 6(C) OF REF A WAS EVER TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY BY THE RTG AND CERTAINLY WAS NOT REGARDED BY THE RTG AS SUFFICIENT REASON NOT TO TAKE POSITIONS WHICH LED TO THE DEPARTURE OF U.S. TROOPS FROM THAILAND. AT NO RPT NO POINT IN OUR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE RTG EARLIER THIS YEAR ON THE RESIDUAL U.S. MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE PRESENCE DID THE THAI INDICATE ANY SPECIAL CONCERN OVER PRC VIEWS ON A CONTINUING U.S. TROOP PRESENCE IN THAILAND. THERE IS NO RPT NO EVIDENCE THAT THAI-PRC RELATIONS HAVE COOLED IN ANY SENSE AS A RESULT OF THAI FAILURE TO FOLLOW PRC ADVISE ON THIS MATTER.

10. RE PARA 6(D). DEPARTMENT'S COMMENT SIGNIFICANTLY MISREPRESENTS WHAT THE EMBASSY STATED IN THIRD PARA OF PAGE 6 OF REF B. A CONSIDERABLE PART OF OUR INTEREST IN THE THAI INSURGENCY IN THE PAST INEVITABLY REFLECTED U.S. CONCERN FOR THE SECURITY OF U.S. TROOPS IN THAILAND, ONCE TOTALLING 50,000. WITH THE REDUCTION OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL TO A SMALL NUMBER, LARGELY IN BANGKOK, THAT SPECIFIC CONCERN HAS GREATLY DIMINISHED.

11. THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE OUR CONSULATES AT UDORN AND SONGKHLA DID NOT RPT NOT ORIGINATE IN THIS MISSION BUT RATHER IN THE PPG IN
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THE DEPARTMENT. THE EMBASSY'S CONTINUING STRONG PREFERENCE FOR KEEPING BOTH CONSULATES OPEN WAS REPEATEDLY MADE KNOWN TO THE DEPARTMENT, WITH EMPHASIS ON THEIR ROLE IN REPORTING ON INSURGENCY MATTERS. ALL OF THE FEED BACK WE HAVE RECEIVED IS THAT, DESPITE OUR EXPRESSED VIEWS, EITHER UDORN OR SONGKHLA IS LIKELY TO BE CLOSED AND POSSIBLY BOTH OF THEM. OUR ASSESSMENT THEREFORE MERELY TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION WHAT WE HAD UNDERSTOOD WAS A

VIRTUAL FAIT ACCOMPLI. IF DEPARTMENT'S COMMENT MEAND THAT FATE OF UDORN AND SONGKHLA NOT RPT NOT YET FINALLY DECIDED, WE WOULD LIKE TO REGISTER ONCE MORE OUR PREFERENCE THAT BOTH BE RETAINED.

12. THE EMBASSY HAS NOT RPT NOT ELIMINATED THE POSITION IN THE EMBASSY DEDICATED TO REPORTING ON THE INSURGENCY. AS WE STATE IN PARA ONE OF PAGE 16 OF REF B, THE POLITICAL SECTION WILL MONITOR AND REPORT ON INSURGENCY/RTG COUNTERINSURGENCY DEVELOPMENTS, INITIALLY ASSISTED BY ONE OFFICER (ON CONTACT) FROM THE OLD POMIL SECTION UNTIL HE DEPARTS IN LATE OCTOBER. AN FSO-4 IN THE POLITICAL SECTION HAS ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR INSURGENCY/COUNTER-INSURGENCY REPORTING, IN ADDITION TO REMAINING POLITICAL-MILITARY MATTERS. THE MISSION'S QUARTERLY INSURGENCY/COUNTERINSURGENCY REPORT WILL SHORTLY BE POUCHED. WE PLAN TO SUBMIT MONTHLY, RATHER THAN QUARTERLY REPORTS WITH GREATER EMPHASIS ON TRENDS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND LESS EMPHASIS ON DETAILS OF MILITARY OPERATIONS.

13. PARA 6(E). VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST SUPPORT FOR THE THAI INSURGENCY IS DISCUSSED IN REF B ONLY IN GENERAL TERMS, AS LITTLE HARD INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE SUBJECT. THE SAME WOULD APPLY TO CHINESE COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT AND ASSISTANCE, WHICH, BEYOND PROVIDING A PLACE FOR THE "VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OF THAILAND", REMAINS LARGELY POLITICAL, RATHER THAN MILITARY. NEITHER VIETNAMESE NOR CHINESE ASSISTANCE IS A CRITICAL FACTOR IN THE THAI INSURGENCY AT THIS TIME OR IN ITS POSSIBLE FUTURE EXPANSION. THE MAIN PROBLEM FOR THE CT'S IS RECRUITMENT OF ADDITIONAL CADRE AND SOLIDERS, WITH EMPHASIS ON RECRUITS FROM AMONG THE CENTRAL PLAINS THAI, THE BACKBONE OF THAILAND. UNTIL THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE EXPANSION BY THE CT'S INTO THE BASIN OF THE CHAO PHYA RIVER NORTH OF BANGKOK, THE THAI INSURGENCY WILL REMAIN A PROBLEM WITHIN THE CAPABILITY OF THE THAI MILITARY TO CONTAIN WITHOUT UNMANAGEABLE COST TO THAILAND.

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14. PARA 6(F). AT THE TIME REF B WAS POUCHED (JUNE 8) THE EMBASSY BELIEVED THAT THE PROSPECTS WERE INDEED "ENCOURAGING THAT THE U.S. WILL BE ABLE TO ATTAIN ITS ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES", ASSUMING THAT THESE INVOLVED THE "KEY INTERESTS" STATED IN PARA 3 ON PAGE 13 OF REF B. IF THE DEPARTMENT CONSIDERS THAT THE OBJECTIVES WE INITIALLY SOUGHT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH WERE, INDEED, OUR "ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES", AND THAT WE BEGAN THE DISCUSSIONS WITH OUR MINIMAL POSITION, THEN THE EMBASSY WAS CERTAINLY MISTAKEN IN SUGGESTING IN REF B THAT ANYTHING LESS THAT WE OBTAINED WOULD CONSTITUTE OUR "ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES".

15. PARA 6(G). THE EMBASSY AGREES THAT DEVELOPMENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE SUBMISSION OF THE ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT ARE OF CONTINUING INTEREST AS THEY AFFECT JUDGEMENTS CONTAINED THEREIN. HOWEVER, BY

ITS NATURE, AN ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT IS UNDERTAKEN ZRNUALLO. SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS ARE REPORTEDLY SEPARATELY AND TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN THE PREPARATION OF THE NEXT ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT.

16. PARA 6(H). EMBASSY HAS THE CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT PROSPECTS FOR SECURITY ASSISTANCE WORLDWIDE ARE UNCERTAIN IN VIEW OF THE TREND OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTION. PROSPECTS FOR GRANT MAP ASSISTANCE, WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD, ARE NOT GOOD BEYOND THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, AND THERE IS EVERY PROSPECT OF WORLD-WIDE LIMITS ON FMS. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS NOT RPT NOT CLEAR HOW MANY MILITARY ASSISTANCE GROUPS WILL SURVIVE 1977. RTG IS WELL AWARE OF CONTRRESSIONAL MOOD, AND SENIOR LEADERS OF RTARF APPEAR RESIGNED TO A PROSPECTIVE END TO GRANT MILITARY ASSISTANCE. WE DID NOT CONSIDER THAT LONG-TERM PLANNING FOR SECURITY ASSISTANCE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS" WAS A PARTICULARLY REWARDING EXERCISE, UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. RTG, FOR ITS PART, HAS EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF MOVING TOWARDS POSITION OF GREATER DEFENSE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND LESS RELIANCE ON U.S. ASSISTANCE JUDGED BY THEM TO BE COMING TO AN END.
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